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ABSTRACT

This study examined how journal writing could improve language minority students' language acquisition. Participants were Serbo-Croatian and Laotian second and third graders from two elementary schools. Initial student surveys and writing assignments, conducted in September to document the problem, found that students lacked writing skills, vocabulary skills, and strong influences in their native languages. Their first language acquisition had not been fully developed. They lacked guidance from their teachers, which resulted in bad learning habits (sloppiness, poor spelling, and lack of self-correction). Based on literature that suggests providing guidance during journal writing time (which builds upon native language skills that can be transferred into English), students participated in a journal writing intervention in which they wrote three types of journals (personal, dialogue, and literary). Teachers observed students daily using a checklist. Students completed a writing assignment and survey at the end of the project. Results indicated that students demonstrated improved writing skills following the intervention. They produced more developed and complex material, and their writing was more mature. They became able to write paragraphs, their sentence structure improved, and the length of their written material increased. (Contains 21 references.) (SM)

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Improving Language Acquisition Through Journal Writing

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Preliminary Abstract

This report expects to show how journaling can improve students' writing. The chosen population consists of second and third grade bilingual students from the same school district. Students are located in two different schools according to their primary language. One targeted group of students speaks Serbo-Croatian and the other speaks Laotian. The problem reveals that students of non-native language struggled with writing in English as a result of being exposed to different format of letters and grammar rules of primary language.

Analysis of probable cause data showed that students lack writing skills, vocabulary limitation, and strong influence of native language. Also, students' language acquisition has not been fully developed. Students of both Serbo-Croatian and Laotian are either first generation or children of first generation parents. In addition, it is noted that students lack guidance from teachers, therefore this caused students to develop bad habits of sloppiness, bad spelling, and lack of self-correction.

The expected solutions to the problem suggested by the literature were to provide guidance during journal writing time and to build upon native language skills that could be transferred into English. Also, in order to expand students' vocabularies teachers can provide visuals like total physical responses (using gestures, mimics, and body language) and to make the writings "real" for students to keep from losing their interest.

Post intervention data that our group expects to find indicate that students will have an improvement in their writing. The writing as a part of the language acquisition would allow students to succeed in the classroom setting. Daily journaling is expected to help make students become more independent and better writers.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students from second and third grade bilingual classrooms often struggled with their writing. As a result this affected students second language acquisition. Evidence for the existence of the problem included students and teacher journaling, teacher observations, and student surveys.

Local Setting

Site A was an elementary school, which consisted of 396 students in grades K-5. There were 65 students who received Transitional Bilingual Education services. Site A also had the English as a Second Language pullout program where 50 children were serviced. There were 68.0 % Majority students and 32.0 % Minority students: 227 Whites, 137 Blacks, and 32 Hispanics. Site A consisted of 78.4. % students that came from low-income families. This site had a 92.9 % attendance rate. It had a 14.1 % mobility rate, 0.9 % chronic truancies, and four students who were chronic truants.

There were eight Limited English Proficient (LEP) children involved in the research at Site A including 4 girls and 4 boys. Site A offered students services and programs including an extended day program, Accelerated Reader, Success For All,

Century 21(extended day program), and YMCA childcare. Site A had an administration that consisted of one principal and one secretary. There were 35 certified teachers in the building.

Site B was an elementary school consisting of 318 students in grades Pre-K-5. The racial breakdown of the students was 21.8% Whites, 32.3% Blacks, 7.3% Hispanics, 38.7% Asian/Pacific Islanders, and 0% Native Americans. Of the student population 92.7% came from low-income families, 35.0% were LEP. Of all the students 92.5% attended school everyday, 9.4% mobility, 6.7% chronic truancy, and 20 students were chronic truants. The targeted classroom contained 13 Laotian Limited English students; eight of whom were girls and five who were boys. Programs in Site B included Transitional Bilingual Education, English as a Second Language program, Host Program, Accelerated Reader, Project Pride, and the Century 21 reading and extended day program.

The Surrounding Community

Both sites belonged to the same school district, which covered 170 sq. miles and served approximately 27,000 students including forty elementary schools, six middle schools, and four high schools. "For the purpose of student assignment (because this district does not have neighborhood schools), controlled choice has eliminated individual school attendance boundaries and divided the district into (3) Zones: West, NE, and SE..." (School report card). As a result, both schools had students coming and being transported by bus from the three district zones.

The district provided education to 53% White, 30.5% Black, 13.1% Hispanic, 3.1% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.2% Native American students. There were 52.6% of students coming from low-income families. The district consisted of 8.2% limited English proficient (LEP) students. There was a 91.4% attendance rate, 15.8% mobility, 11.9% chronic truancy, and 2,981 chronic truants.

In the district there were approximately 1,700 teachers, comprised of 88.9% White, 5.9% Black, 3.9% Hispanic, 1.1% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.2% Native American. Of these teachers, 73.6% were female and 26.4% were male. The average teaching experience of the district's certified teachers was 17.2 years. As far as education background 32.2% held a Bachelor's degree, whereas 67.7% held a Master's degree. The pupil-teacher ratio at the elementary level had been defined as 18.9:1. The average teaching salary for full-time certified staff was $49,048.

Both sites were located in the second largest city in a Midwestern state in the Great Lakes area. This city, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, 1998, had a total population of 143,763. According to the U.S. Dept. of Commerce, 1999, and Woods and Poole Economics, 2000, there was a total of 135,480 households. Among these households, 51,450 (37.9%) had an income of less than $29,999. Middle income households ranging from $30,000-$75,000 were represented by 72,270 (53.3%) of the people and 9,300 (6.8%) households earned between $75,000-$124,999. Finally, 2,740 (2.0%) households had an income of more than $125,000 per year.

In this city, there were approximately 14,000 businesses. Manufacturing provided 30.3% of all jobs. There was a 4.5% unemployment rate compared to the nation's 4.2% unemployment rate.

National Context of the Problem

Writing is an important part of young children's learning process. Learning how to write is one of the basic skills that must be mastered by children in the primary grades. According to Dickinson and DiGisi, it was found that "the amount of writing children did in class was correlated with 1st grade reading achievement. Students with higher reading achievement scores were in classrooms where teachers asked students to engage in narrative and informational writing". Findings confirmed that writing contributed to reading comprehension and fluency. "When children have many opportunities to write and when reading and writing are integrated into content area studies, children become better readers and writers" (Dickinson and DiGisi, 1998, p.24).

An educator's willingness and dedication contributed to a student's quality of writing. "A teacher gets more from her students if [he or she] displays conviction, personality, and a passion for writing and communication. ... It requires the whole teacher, enthusiasm, creativity, demonstration, and attention to each student's paper as they work" (Owen, 2000, p. 104).

Educators recognized the importance of providing writing opportunities to young children. "Writing time demonstrated the purposes of literacy and helped them feel comfortable and active in our literate classroom" (Smith, 1998, p.22). In order to help a child feel comfortable and motivated, an educator needs to provide strategies and techniques. Among these techniques and strategies is Interactive Writing. According to Pinnell and Fountas (1998, p.192), "one of the advantages of interactive writing is that the children are focused on the construction of their message—recording an experience or producing their own story". This writing activity can enhance children's knowledge

about letters, sounds, and words. Pinnell and Fountas defined demonstrative writing as a part of interactive writing. Demonstrative writing was when a teacher supported the students by exposing the children to more complex writing samples and patterns that they would not otherwise comprehend without support (1998, p.192).

Through classroom participation and interaction students constructed a sense of self as a reader, writer, and thinker. "Writing can help students to learn an academic subject and develop abilities to think critically about what they learn" (Downey, www-gse.Berkeley.edu/research/NCSWL/research.html).

Researchers' Perspective of Local Context

Both sites had a large percentage of students who came from low-income households. This factor may have affected the students' exposure to print. Both sites also had many students who came from diverse ethnic backgrounds. This ethnic diversity may also have resulted in different standards and norms that they learned initially in their homes. The children transferred these norms into the classroom and therefore presented diverse attitudes and motivation toward the learning process. These attitudes were seen as both positive and negative. The dynamics of the classroom were strongly affected by these norms and attitudes that consequently presented a challenge for the teacher and students. The teacher's role of stimulating the children became the most crucial factor for student success.

Neither site A nor site B was a neighborhood school. This seemed to present the problem of negative social interaction among the children. The school communities did not have a positive impact on student and parental involvement. One of the reasons for

little parental involvement was the lack of free time. Most of the time parents had to work in two different places for sixteen hours a day to be able to support the basic needs of the family. Another reason why the targeted students' parents were not involved in the home-school relationship was the fact of cultural differences that existed between the school and the home. The majority of parents were still unable to communicate in English. Therefore, parents felt intimidated and as a result were unwilling to make contact with the school or attend school activities. Lack of language as a part of the culture stimulated parental involvement in the school life. Those two factors played a tremendous role in students' learning. This created a lack of participation and ultimately resulted in poor learning progress.

The teachers in this district were qualified educators with many years of teaching experience. However, few teachers understood the nature of the second language acquisition due to lack of previous training in this subject. The language acquisition requires teachers to provide meaningful and comprehensible inputs for non-English speaking students on a daily basis. Teachers who were not trained may not be able to provide proper instructions to second language learners in the daily curriculum.

Nevertheless, teachers' experience might be a positive ingredient that may have influenced students' motivation and academic achievement. This meant that the more experienced educator might possibly have known better how to reach the struggling and challenging pupils and may be more sensitive to the students' particular needs. These educators may have possibly known a variety of methods and techniques to enhance students' interest and motivation in order to reach every child's highest potential.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

The groups targeted for this research included bilingual students of second and third grade. The second graders were of Laotian descent whereas the third graders were Serbo-Croatian descent. The Laotian students belonged to a self-contained classroom while the Serbo-Croatians were from regular classrooms serviced in a transitional pull-out program. The students had poor writing skills. Evidence of this was derived from initial student surveys, writing assessments, teacher observation, checklists, and journaling.

Students completed a survey in late September to document the problem (see Appendix A). The initial student writing survey mainly focused on their feelings and attitudes toward writing. The students were also asked about what they liked or disliked about writing. Students were asked if they kept journals and where they mainly wrote their journals. The last question in the survey asked the students about whether or not they thought they had problems with their writings.

The first question on the survey asked, "How do you feel about writing"? Eighty-one percent of students liked to write. This indicated that the majority of students had a positive attitude toward writing. In the second and third questions of the survey, students were asked what they liked or disliked about writing. The responses varied from one another as shown in table 1. The majority of students liked or disliked writing due to how good or bad their handwriting was. This indicated that students with good handwriting liked to write which had nothing to do with the quality or depth of their writing. Students with poor handwriting did not like to write because of their lack of confidence in their handwriting.

Table 1- Number 2 and 3 From Initial Survey

Responses to liking/disliking writing	Percentage of Students
Good or bad handwriting	26%
To become a better writer	25%
For pleasure	14%
For drawing	10%
No response	25%

Students were asked if they kept a journal or diary at home. Fifty-two percent of students kept a journal or diary at home. This indicated that the students who did keep some kind of writing sample were more likely to write than those students who did not. Forty-eight percent of students who did not keep any form of writing at home only experienced writing at school or from assigned homework. This indicated that the

students did not write for the pleasure of writing or to further thinking resulting from writing down thoughts and ideas.

The last question pertained to whether students felt that they did need help with writing, they were doing fine, or they didn't need help. Fifty-one percent of students indicated that they did not need help with their writing. According to Table 1, 52% of students said that they keep a journal at home which corresponded to Table 2 which indicated that 51% percent of students did not need help on writing. It can be said that the students who kept any form of writing other than the writings from a school setting had a better grasp on writing. Students also were more confident about their writing.

Table 2- Number 6 From Initial Survey

Do You Need Help With Your Writing?	Percentage of Students
Need help	14%
Is doing fine	35%
Does not need help	51%

The students were given an initial writing assessment to assess their writing skills (see Appendix B). "Imagine you are the richest kid in the world. What would you do with your money? Where would you go? What would you like to change in your life?" Students' writing was scored with a rubric. If students received one point it meant that students gave little evidence of thoughtfulness. If students received a two, it meant that the writing contained some evidence of thoughtfulness. The writings were supported by specific examples. The writing was a list instead of a complete paragraph. If students

received three points, it meant that the writing contained strong evidence of thoughtfulness followed by examples and personal reflections.

According to Table 3, approximately 57% of the students scored two points for their writing indicating that the majority of the students were average writers. Only 14% of the students received a perfect three points for their sample writing. Students who received one point were ranked at 24% and about 5% of the students did not respond on their writing. This demonstrated that students might be incapable of writing due to their lack of language proficiency. The majority of students were average in their writing, but 29% of them still showed a lack of writing skills. The results of the writing sample showed that only 14% of the students excelled in their writing.

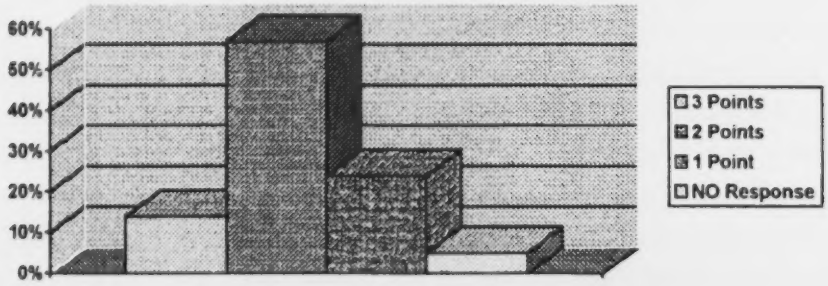
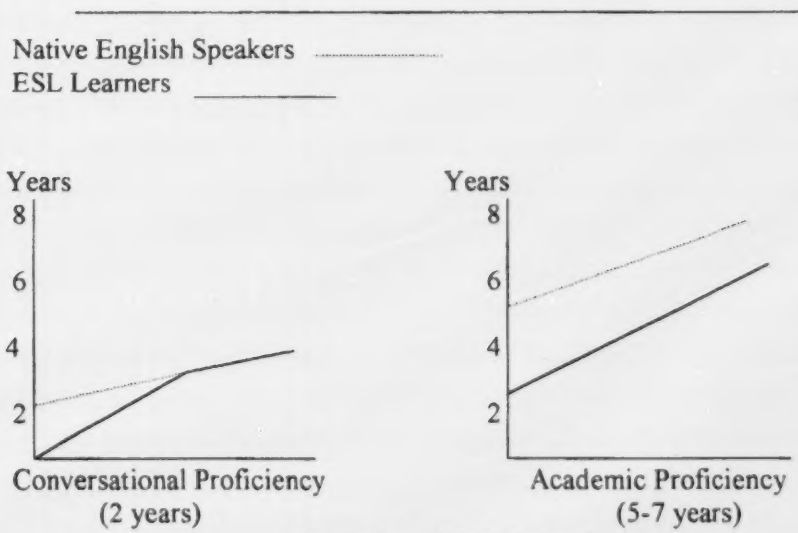


Table 3 Sample Writing

Probable Causes

Teachers had often complained that their students had been in the United States for a number of years, so the student should have been capable of writing. Literature

showed that it took five to seven years before bilingual students could achieve a level of proficiency in their second language. There were four major skills in the language acquisition. They were parallel and compared to the first language acquisition. Those stages were listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The difference between the first language and second language acquisition was that instructions in reading and writing instruction in the second language could not be delayed until ESL students had mastered their listening and speaking skills. "Sometimes mainstream and ESL teachers waited too long before implementing reading and writing into the curriculum,"(Law and Eckes, 2000). Writing as a part of language acquisition was the most difficult and time-consuming component of the learning process (Cummins, 2000). The reason was that writing required skills that were located in the cognitive and academic area of language acquisition (Kreshen, 1999).



(Cummins, 2001) Figure 1
Length of Time Required to
Achieve Age-Appropriate Levels of
Conversational and Academic Communicate Proficiency

The literature suggested several causes for the problem of ESL students who were coping with the difficulties of writing. According to Bello (1997), writing could be used as a vehicle to enhance students' knowledge about grammar and vocabulary that they were learning in the class. Also, writing enhanced the development of language once students experimented with words and some samples of writing to convey their ideas effectively.

Frequently, ESL students had problems with expressing concepts and ideas in English due to their language limitations (University of Hawaii Manoa Writing Program, 2001). This occurred when students were to write about concepts that were foreign to them. In certain stages of the language acquisition students were unable to apply broad vocabularies such as synonyms, antonyms, and low frequency words as a result of the lack of exposure to the second language (Cummins, 2001).

Another issue that caused students to have problems with writing was due to being taught grammar and mechanics instead of focusing on content and meanings (O,Malley and Pierce, 1996). Teachers sometimes had a tendency to over-exaggerate on the mechanics of writing. This caused students to be intimidated by over-exposure to syntax and grammar. As a consequence they did not pay attention to the form of their writing. Situations such as this created a discomfort in students' ability to take a risk and write freely. Students seeing many red marks on their paper lost their confidence and self-esteem. Research showed that correcting errors had little or no value. "Corrections can actually impede progress because (1) the students are given the message that being correct is more important than what they have to say; (2) students are distracted from the task at hand-communicating"(Law and Eckes, 2000).

Literature also suggested that students' writing often reflected the influences from their native language. This was to be expected and was a part of the natural writing process in the second language (O'Neil, 1992). "Research shows that children's writing in a bilingual program does not occur in a linear way but successive reorganizations as students create, apply, revise, and abandon hypotheses about writing, using knowledge from the first and second languages" (Edelsky, 1996). This stage of language acquisition included "errors" in spelling and syntax. It might also cause some code switching to occur. Those miscues were typical for the second language acquisition process as students engage in writing.

Law and Eckes (2000), stated that writing was a long process that involved many fronts: teaching writing skills and problem solving strategies, allowing students to write freely and frequently. Over time students' writing became more fluent and less error ridden. Eventually the writing process was less stressful and more pleasurable. To achieve, the time was a crucial factor to enhance students' writing abilities. ESL students did not have the luxury to spend enough time on developing their writing potential ability in a stress free environment.

According to Blanchard and Root (1997), the majority of mainstream teachers did not possess the knowledge about the structure and the organization of thoughts in students' native languages. As the result of this problem there was no logic, organization, or thought patterns because of the influence of the first language. Teachers did not give enough modeling instructions on how to organize thoughts. "That is why it rarely works to write something in your native language and then translate it into English. The words may be in English, but the logic, organization, and thought pattern reflect

those of students' native languages" (Blanchard and Root, 1997). The lack of modeling resulted in students being incapable of applying strategies which could be used to improve their writing. Students wouldn't be able to self-select some strategies that could be implemented during the independent process of writing (Chamot and O'Malley, 1994).

Because of the lack of modeling writers were not familiar with various ways of organizing different types of writing and expressing meanings through syntactic constructions and writing conventions. Many times students had learned to write in isolation from reading and other activities related to literacy (O'Malley and Pierce, 1996). O'Malley and Pierce also indicates that in order for students to write well students needed to incorporate the purpose into their own style of writing. Lack of purpose in writing does not determine the nature of writing. Students did not see a clear application of writing in order to plan and compose a piece that responded to the task at hand. Another critical factor that made students' writing poor was the lack of personal interest (Hudelson, 1989). Students did not have an interest in writing a paper that did not relate to them or to their prior knowledge. Many times writing instructions were provided in isolation from students' educational and experiential background knowledge. Therefore, writing became meaningless and purposeless for them (Peregoy and Boyle, 1993).

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

A common misconception of most parents and educators was in assuming that it was easy to acquire a language. Language development is a life long process (Ovando and Collier, 1998). Literacy in the first language affected the second language acquisition. In other words, as students became more fluent in their native language the skills learned in their first language might be transferred to their second language acquisition. Acquisition of a second language was equally complex (Ovando and Collier, 1998). First language literacy was considered a vital foundation for second language development.

Newcomers who had no previous English had to build proficiency in English and catch up to the native speakers. Cultural knowledge rooted in the native student's past experience added to the second language acquisition. As stated by Ovando and Collier (1998), research has shown that second language acquisition took a minimum of five to ten years to attain grade-level norms in English. It might take even longer when students do not have a literacy base in their first language.

The language acquisition contains five developmental stages, which includes listening, speaking, reading, writing, and critical thinking. The writing stage is one of the most difficult stages to obtain (Law and Eckes, 2000). ESL writers, some of whom are beginning writer and others who have had more prior experience in writing, must cope with the challenge of formulating thoughts using words, grammar, and structures that are unfamiliar to them.

Generally speaking, the second language acquisition contains two parts. The first is called BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and the second is called CALP (Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency). BICS represent the social part of language acquisition that could be observed on a daily basis; for instance, when the students communicated among themselves and English speaking students for basic social interactions. CALP represents the part of the language that cannot be seen or heard. This part contains reading, writing, and meta-cognitive thinking processes. These components were much more difficult and time consuming to achieve than social language. By not acknowledging this fact most students might be prematurely exited from the bilingual programs causing students to struggle and fail in mainstream classrooms (Cummins, 2000).

According to Law and Eckes (2000), to become an effective writer students need to be immersed in writing on a daily basis. Students also need to be surrounded in a supportive environment with immediate feedback and guidance from teachers. Most importantly time was a crucial factor in determining students' accomplishments.

Another critical aspect of becoming a good writer was related to the student's socio-cultural background and family's attitude toward formal schooling (Ovando and Collier, 1998). As parents gave more support the student's progress might increase.

Potential problems, as described by Joyce, Weil and Calhoun (2000), could occur when there are great differences between family languages. For instance, certain Asian languages are different from English language; therefore, the shape of the letters, syntax, and grammar rules may be completely unfamiliar to students' prior experiences.

Also, students' cultural backgrounds might cause some problems because some schools were not reaching many of them effectively in terms of accomplishment or cultural dignity. By not acknowledging students' ability to write in their native language, schools were viewing students as illiterates. Consequently, the time taken to master writing might take much longer and would be more excruciating for the students (Joyce, Weil, and Calhoun, 2000).

Instructions provided by teachers were often too abstract for students to comprehend, making the writing process an unpleasant experience. Students were coping with unknown vocabularies, and as a result they were unable to apply words to writing. The second part of the problem was that there were no connections between reading and writing instructions given by teachers (Karlin and Karlin, 1987; Ovando and Collier, 1998). Cobine (1995), suggested that writing should be inextricably related to reading. To increase students' comprehension and communication skills, the writing process cannot be isolated from the reading materials.

The students lacked modeling of effective writing by teachers on a daily basis. These students did not have a chance to write frequently in a school setting. ESL students

needed to have instruction written and repeated slowly for them to comprehend. Lack of visuals also may have affected students writing performance (Pinnell and Fountas, 1998).

Another obstacle for students was lack of purpose. Without it students might not be engaged in the process of writing. The teacher was still an important audience, however many students put a different effort into writing once they knew the audience (Burns, 1999).

Finally, some teachers did not pay attention to students as individuals. Instructions given to students were not addressing individual's needs and abilities. As a result, students' lack of attention and attitudes caused some academic problems, which could worsen due to lack of intervention (Allen, 1995).

Potential Solution From Literature

Acknowledging students' culture enables teachers to provide a better and more powerful instruction. Since culture plays an important role in the learning process, teachers need to increase their sensitivity toward the cultural influences on social, curricular, and organizational structures of the school. According to the Council on Anthropology and Education:

1. Culture is intimately related to language and the development of basic communication, computation, and social skills.
2. Culture is an important part of the dynamics of the teaching-learning process in all classrooms, both bilingual and monolingual.
3. Culture affects the organization of learning, pedagogical practices, evaluative procedures, and rule of schools, as well instructional activities and curriculum.
4. Culture is more than the heritage of a people through dance, food, holidays, and history. Culture is more than a component of bilingual education programs. It is dynamic, creative, and continuous process, which includes behaviors, values, and substances shared by people that guides them in their struggle for survival and gives meaning to their lives. As a vital process it needs to be understood by more people in the United States, a multiple society that has many interacting cultural groups. (Ovando and Collier, 1998, p.171-2)

Second, teachers have to provide appropriate instruction to the students' level of language acquisition, which allows students to follow directions. Also, students have to "feel" the purpose of writing and it must fit their abilities (Karlin and Karlin, 1987). By providing effective strategies of writing throughout the school year the students may increase their capabilities to write. Students may voluntarily use different methods or styles in their writings. Students may become more proficient and independent writers.

There are different types of journals that can be used in the classroom setting. These journals include dialogue journals, literary journals, prompt journals, and subject journals, all of which can develop students' spelling, grammar, and handwriting. These journals may foster written conversations and friendships among students (Bromley and Powell, 1999).

Using a variety of journals for students' daily writing may be beneficial to them. For instance, dialogue journals can improve certain areas of learning such as: interaction about topics relevant to learning, enhancement of reading skills, modeling of correct grammatical forms, and natural evolution of grammatical structures (Holmes and Moulton, 1997). Journal writing provides additional opportunities for the students to develop fluency in a meaningful context. It also encourages ESL students to take a risk because it is a non-threatening literacy activity in which pupils can freely experiment with the second language as they attempt to communicate their thoughts in written form. The emergent stage of literacy provides the opportunities for independent writing (Strickland and Morrow, 1990).

Journals may be used as a perfect tool to assess students' development in literacy skills and his/her transition into the second language acquisition. In addition, journals

provide information for teachers about each child's interest, ideas, and concerns (Flores et al, 1985).

Writing fluency progresses to a greater level when students have the freedom of choosing their topic of interest. Furthermore, writing becomes easier and more natural when it is unstressed by structures and grammars. Consequently students' motivation will boost (Holmes and Moulton, 1997).

Not only does writing contribute to writing fluency but it also requires students to think in English. This makes the thinking process more in depth in either language. Thinking up concepts to write about, thinking through ideas, and putting down thoughts on paper becomes easier for all students throughout the school year (Holmes and Moulton, 1997).

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of students' daily journaling, during the period of September 2001 to December 2001, the 2nd grade students from the targeted classes will increase their ability to write and use the suitable skills and strategies to become independent writers as measured by teacher-made rubrics and reviews of journals.

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes will be necessary:

1. Different strategies and techniques will be introduced to students to develop their abilities to write independently.

2. Different types of journaling will be presented to students.

3. Teachers will demonstrate the samples for good journaling.

Action Plan

Project Objectives:

Students will gain knowledge to become better writers through the use of journals and guidance from teachers.

Teachers will gain the knowledge of how to implement and invent the best strategies during the process of teaching.

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
**Introduce idea of journal to students.* **Inform parents of research project by letters.* **Start survey of students' interests and abilities in writing.* **Students write on a daily basis throughout the week.*	**Students write and draw in journals freely according to prompt.* **Share time*	**Start students on capitalization.* **Apply rubrics*	**Start students on punctuation.*
Week 5	**Week 6**	**Week 7**	**Week 8**
**Continue personal journaling* **Rubrics*	**Stress spelling* **Students continue personal journaling* **Teacher checklist*	**Introduction to Dialogue journal* **Rubrics*	**Dialogue journal* **Teacher checklist*

Week 9	Week 10	Week 11	Week 12
**Continue Dialogue Journal* **Rubric*	**Dialogue journal* **Teacher checklist*	**Dialogue journal* **Rubric*	**Introduction to Literary journal* **Teacher checklist* **Mini-lesson on guideline*
Week 13	**Week 14**	**Week 15**	**Week 16**
**Literary journal* **Rubric*	** Literary journal* **Teacher checklist*	** Literary journal* **Rubric*	** Literary journal* **Teacher checklist*

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the positive effects of daily writing on the second language acquisition, four different types of journals will be used. In addition, teacher observation, rubrics, and survey will be developed. Journals will be used to assess students' ability and development as a successful writer. These journals include: literacy journals,

dialogue journals, subject journals, and personal journals. Through literacy journaling, students will read chapter books and respond to written materials in their journals. At the same time, students will work on reading strategies such as prediction, making inferences, describing characters, etc. In addition, teachers, to insure individual quality of students' writing will introduce grammar and mechanics. This part of instruction will be provided for the students throughout the research.

Dialogue journals will be used as a source of communication amongt students and the teacher. Students will respond in writing to certain real situations and share these responses with each other.

Subject journals will be used to cover content areas such as science and social studies. Students will respond to particular questions after reading the textbook using strategies presented by the teacher. In addition, it would be a great opportunity to respond in writing to experimentations and hands on activities provided in the class.

Finally, the personal journal will be used as an instrument to measure or check students' engagement all the way through the process of writing. Students will write whatever interest them or according to prompts. They will share their opinions, feelings, and point of view in a stress free atmosphere.

During journal writings the teacher will observe students' engagement and behavior by using observation checklists and rubrics. This will be an ongoing process throughout the research time. Surveys will be given to students at the beginning and the end of the project as the additional instrument to determine students' motivation and willingness to write.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to improve bilingual students' ability to write as a part of the second language acquisition. In order to achieve these desired changes several strategies were used. The major components of this project were the use of different types of journals, teacher checklists, rubrics, and surveys.

Original plans called for four different types of journals but only three were used. These journals included personal journals, dialogue journals, and literary journals (see sample journal pages in Appendix D, E, and F). The journal that was excluded from the original plan was the subject journal due to lack of time. In total, sixteen weeks were used to research the project. The initial week was used as an introduction to the concept of the different types of journals that students would be using. The first week was also used for introducing the project's objectives to students and parents. Parents were asked to sign a permission slip allowing students to participate in the research. The opening week was also used for surveying students on their interests and abilities as potential writers. Observations of group functioning led the teachers to conclude that the students'

skills necessary to become independent writers were developing at a slow pace, therefore additional time had to be applied.

All implementations of the intervention had been divided into four weeks at a time. With each four weeks a new journal was introduced along with some new strategies by the teacher researchers. In order to increase the students' writing and interest the first four weeks were devoted to personal journal writing. Students had to respond to prompts that were given by the teachers. The prompts mainly reflected students' interests or opinions. The second four weeks were dedicated to the introduction, and dialogue journaling where students were asked to respond to certain topics. Students were put in pairs where they had to dialogue on a particular subject and to share their opinions with each other. The third and fourth fifth-weeks were assigned to literary journals. The periods of the research project were combined due to the holiday season when students were in school. During this time, students were responding in their journals to books that they selected to read.

In addition, some methods of assessing students' progress in writing were used such as: surveys, checklists and rubrics. A survey was applied at the beginning of writing and at the end of the project. Throughout the project teachers used checklists, and observed students to ensure students' engagement and motivation in the writing process. Rubrics were applied as a measurement to check students' skills in writing (see Appendix C).

Throughout the intervention period students observed and discussed demonstrations performed by the instructors. The teachers' modelings were applied consistently as a part of the daily strategies.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the development of students' level in writing, students had to write three different types of journals. During the first five-weeks segment, they wrote personal journals where they responded to prompts given by the teachers. During the second five-weeks, students wrote the dialogue journals. At this point, they worked in pairs responding to each other's questions on certain topics. The teachers chose the topics as well. The last five-weeks segment, students spent time writing the literary journals. Students read books according to their interests and their level of language acquisition. During the research students wrote in a stress free environment without worry of punishment. However, the teachers continually applied modeling strategies throughout the intervention.

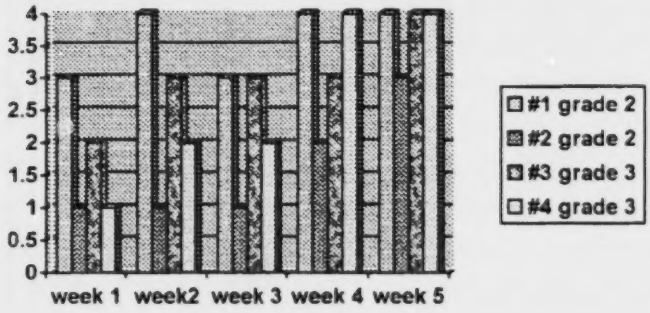
Also, the teachers observed students on a daily basis by using an observation checklist. Included on the checklist were students' attitudes toward writing, students' engagements during writing, and students' willingness to use strategies that were modeled.

In addition, students were given surveys and a writing assignment at the beginning and the end of the project. These were used as a measurement of students' prior abilities and attitudes toward writing and developmental gains during the project.

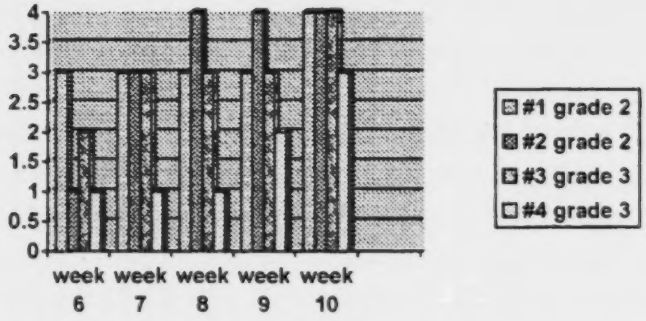
For data collection, the researchers randomly chose two students' journals from each grade level. For each period of time (five-weeks), the researchers compared students' ability to write according to established criteria from a rubric. The first type of

journal that was analyzed was the personal journal. The primary ingredient of writing that had been measured was the length of students' writing.

Personal journal length figure A1



Dialogue journal length figure B1



Literary journal length figure C1

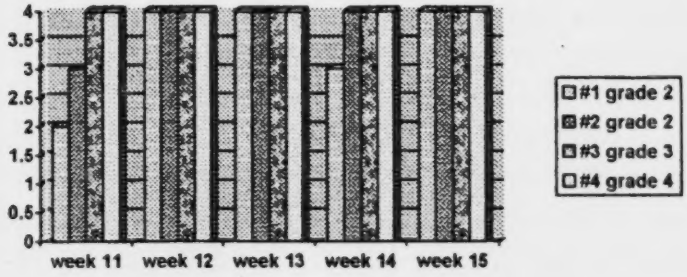


Figure A1, B1, and C1 (previous page) show students' growth in length during writing in their personal, dialogue, and literary journals from week 1 to week 16. The bars with #1 and #2 were students from second grade. The bars with #3 and #4 were students from grade three. The figures above showed students' improvement from week 1 to week 16. Each student started at a different level, but during the intervention time each student gradually improved overtime. The length of writing depended on several components such as students' interest on a particular subject and mental and physical predisposition, which may have caused the fluctuation of writing. Students' capabilities of writing have been confirmed by the teachers' observation checklist during their writing time. Once students seemed to be more motivated to write on certain topics due to their interest or predisposition they wrote more. Sometimes, teachers noticed a lack of interest. As a result, students did not meet the minimum requirements of the journals.

Also, results from the figures above showed that students had an easier time with the literary journal compared to the personal or dialogue journals. It might have been because some of the prompts given by teachers weren't as interesting. Dialogue journals were the more difficult for students due to the fact that dialogue journaling was a relatively new concept for students. They required a different approach and different

abilities from the students. They had to be more willing to share their ideas with someone else. Also, they had to be able to analyze someone else's writing.

Figure A2-Complete sentences –personal

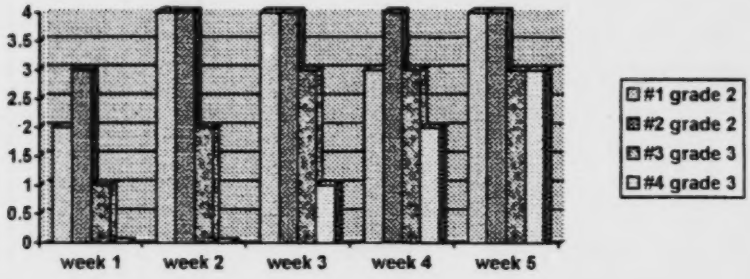


Figure B2-Complete sentences-dialogue

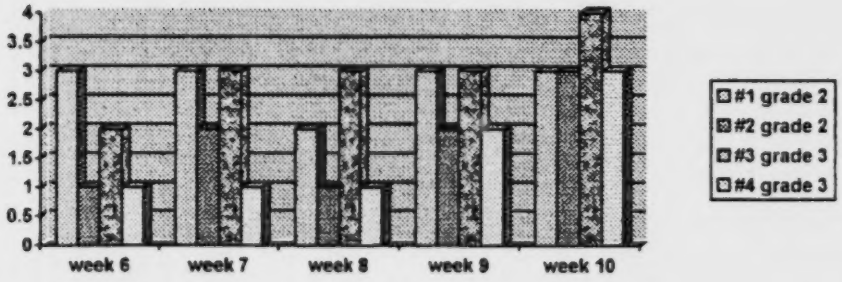
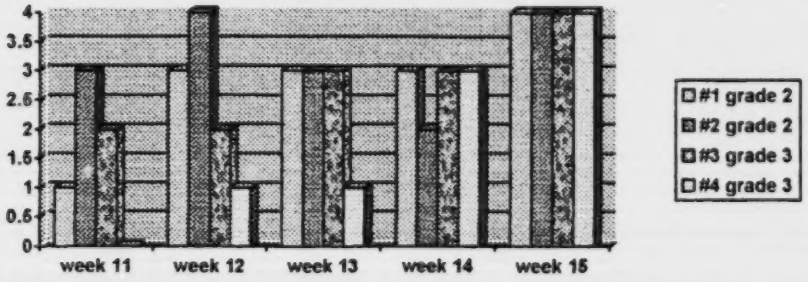


Figure C2- Complete sentences- Literary



Figures A2, B2, and C2 shown above represent the students' ability to write complete sentences. According to the rubric, there were two components measured for complete sentences. The first was capitalization and the second was punctuation. These two parts were modeled throughout the project and they were scored according to the criteria of the rubric.

As shown above, each student made progress throughout the project. However, their growth was not consistent. Some students such as student #4 still had difficulty in applying punctuations and capitalization norms. For instance, this particular student scored 0 points on the eleventh week of writing which means that every day during the week he/she was not using proper capitalization and punctuation marks. At the same time, the rest of the students made satisfactory progress. By the last week of the project all students were able to apply basic skills into their writing. In comparison, there was a large growth between the first and last week of writing. Over a period of time students had gotten used to writing. In Figure C2, week fifteen had shown the most progress made by students.

On the contrary, the dialogue journal was the most challenging part of writing. Students had difficulty using question marks. Most of the time students were unable to distinguish differences between the regular sentences and questions.

Figure A3- Content-Personal

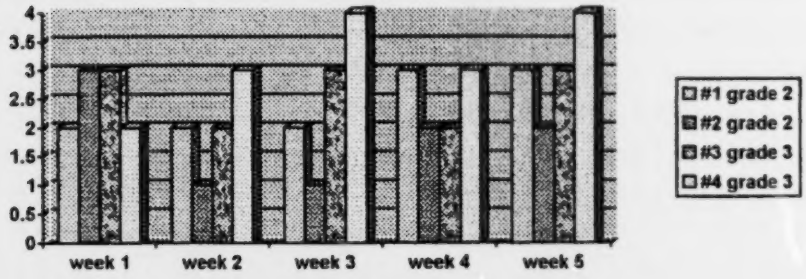


Figure B3-Content-Dialogue

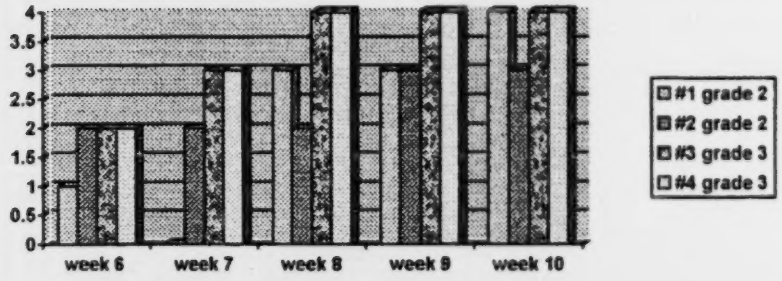
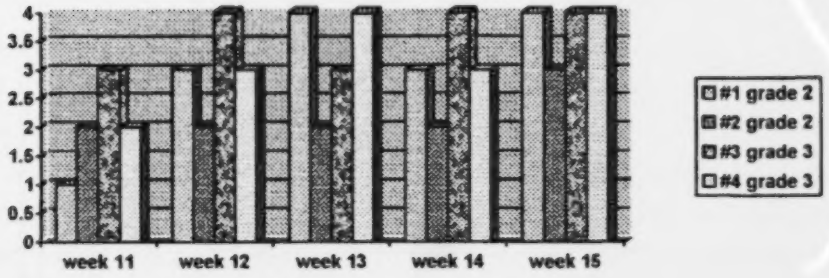


Figure C3-Content-Literary



Figures A3, B3, and C3 shows students responding in their writings measured by content. According to the rubric, students had to respond clearly and logically to prompts. They had to ask themselves "Does it make sense?" The teachers had reinforced this strategy throughout the entire writing project.

The data showed a great enhancement in students' writing. Each of the randomly chosen students scored better on content than on any other criteria. Furthermore, the growth was steady over the period of time. The growth was observed for each different type of journals. For instance, student #1 achieved tremendous progress in his/her content writing that has been shown in figure B3 for dialogue journaling. Due to modeling from the teacher, the two third-grade students already possessed a strong knowledge in content and they applied this particular skill successfully. This was shown in figures in A3, B3, and C3.

In figure C3, students achieved the best score mainly consisting of four points. The teacher observation checklist confirms this achievement. During the literary journal

writing, students' writing was enhanced by their interest in their book selection. Pupils presented a positive attitude toward writing and they were also using their time the most effectively. Students' engagement in their writing contributes to their high scores.

Figure A4-Paragraph-Personal

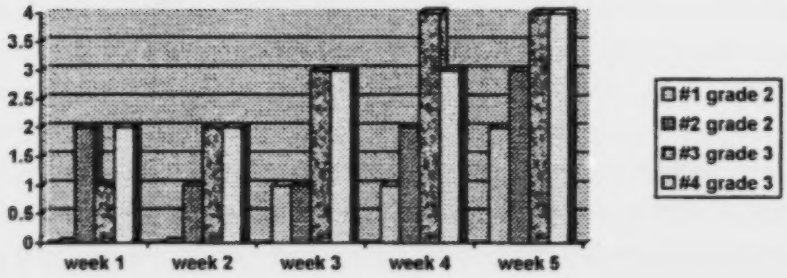


Figure B4-Dialogue-Journal

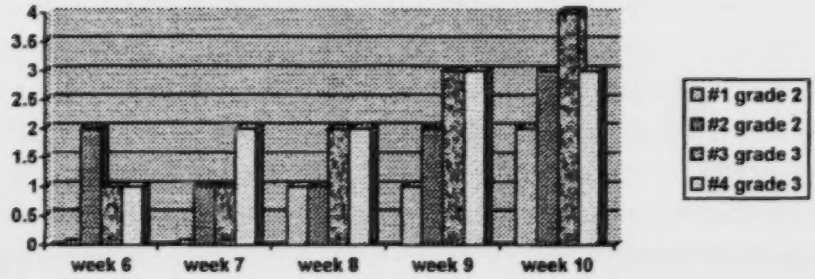
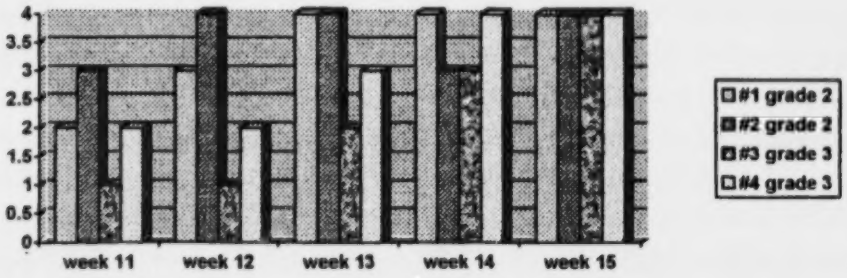


Figure C4-Paragraph-Literary



Figures A4, B4, and C4 show students' abilities to write paragraphs. The criteria established by the teachers were to eliminate writing of lists and to promote as much fluency in writing as possible. The figures above confirmed that it was difficult to change students' habits of writing. They were quite often using lists in their writing instead of incorporating paragraphs despite ongoing modeling from the teachers. This can be viewed in the above graphs.

In the last graph, the literary journal, students showed great improvement due to the length of the time of exposure (week 11 to week 15). Eventually, students were able to write in paragraph form by the end of the project. The randomly chosen students received the maximum points for paragraph writing, none of whom were using lists. It was relatively easier for students to use paragraphs in the literary journals because students were summarizing and predicting the next chapter if they were reading chapter books.

Again, the most challenging journal to write was the dialogue journal. Students lacked the ability to communicate effectively in writing, making them unable to answer or to create questions. Another part of the problem was giving simple answers such as "yes" or "no". In addition, once students answered the question by a simple "yes" or

"no" he/she was not willing to create additional questions to keep the dialogue going. This was a typical miscue for student #4.

Figure 4-Total Points-Personal Journal

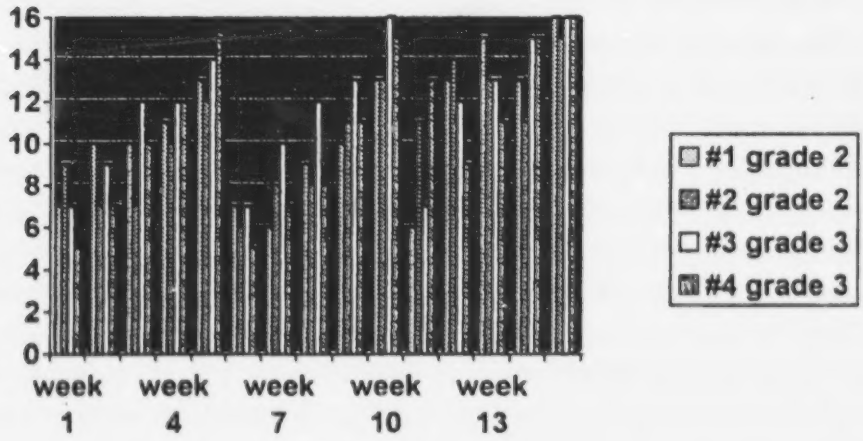


Figure 4 shows the total points received for each selected student during the research project. On this chart, three different types of journals are shown. In addition, each of the criteria from the rubric has been added together (length, complete sentences, content, paragraph/dialogue). This is a global view of students' performance during research time. Overall, each of the four randomly chosen students made great progress in developing their writing skills. The writing skills contributed to the students' second language acquisition as one of the most difficult elements. There were some individual achievement differences among the randomly chosen students. Each student had a different style and ability at the beginning of the project. There were several factors during the project which might influence students' final result. For instance,

students' interest might drop or increase depending on the presented topic or the selection of books that they made.

Also, the concentration level was dependent on the holidays or special events. This could be the additional destructive factor or reinforcement. These issues have been validated by the teachers' observation checklist, which had been applied during the research. Despite the obstacles, each student obtained new necessary skills in writing. As a result, there were better writers at the end of the project as compared to the beginning of the project.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data, the students demonstrated an improvement in their writing. Compared to the beginning of the project, students gained more knowledge and skills about journal writing. This type of writing was a relatively new experience for second language learners. The majority of students were not exposed to this kind of writing. As a result of this, the first week of the project was dedicated to introducing students to the idea of journal writing and what skills were involved. Modeling took place throughout the research project. This time was the most crucial part for students' instruction. On the contrary, lack of modeling may result in students' inabilities to apply certain strategies and techniques during the writing process.

The teachers have observed an immense growth in certain components of students' writing. First of all, students made tremendous progress in the content area of writing. By the end of the project students were able to produce a more developed and complex material. Their writing was more mature compared to the beginning of writing.

Students were better able to express the main point and determine the conclusion in a more logical way.

Secondly, students escaped from writing lists to paragraph writing. This was one of the biggest achievements of this project. However, some students still had the tendency to switch to writing lists. This meant that additional instructions had to be continued throughout the rest of the school year.

Third, as far as sentence structure such as punctuation and capitalization, students made another milestone. Almost all of the students were able to apply and write proper sentences. In addition, students were able to apply self-correction strategies presented by the teachers at the start of each introduction to each type of journal.

Fourth, the length of students' writing was improved radically. This means that students possessed the abilities and willingness to produce independent writing materials. Throughout the project teachers also observed that students' writing escalated when writing prompts were more to students' interest such as holidays and good self-selection of books. Students' mood increased the length of their writing. This however did not mean that they were perfect in writing. Students still made typical mistakes but overall they were willing to take risks and kept on trying in a stress free atmosphere. Creating a positive atmosphere for independent writing seemed to be a vital element of students' enhancement.

Another component of students writing which contributed to quality writing is to provide students with ample time to write on a daily basis. The quality of writing will increase once students have a chance to write every day little by little instead of intense

writing periodically. This is the power of journal writing that was experienced throughout the entire period of research.

In conclusion, the results of this project show some success in advancing students' abilities to become more independent writers. The goal of the project has been achieved; which was to improve second language acquisition through writing journals. Each of the students contributed and benefited from this sixteen-week project. However, the growth was individual and differed for each student depending on each student's prior knowledge and motivation during the writing process.

Continued research could extend writing for a full year to obtain students' potential. The teachers involved in the research recognized how difficult and challenging the writing process can be for second language learners. Thus, additional time spent on writing would be beneficial. Furthermore, modeling must be implemented and applied continuously beyond the research time. Students need to be exposed and aware of certain strategies and techniques to writing. Lack of good writing samples might result in poor quality writing for students. Students have to know and see good writing material on a daily basis to be able to apply what they see.

Personal Perspective From Researchers

Throughout the project it has been a very rewarding experience to take an ordinary everyday exercise and be able to take a very close look at what is actually going on with the process and with our students' thinking and writing skills. The teacher's checklist has been very beneficial to gaining an insight on students' progress in writing and to see students' growth in motivation and engagement in writing. We also observed

obstacles such as holidays, which can cause some distractions. Special events in the school can also prevent students from being pulled out of class for the ESL program. Another obstacle was the limitation in time. Sometimes I wished to be able to have the students for a longer amount of time to be able to fully explain or model new strategies. The time would be needed for students' to self-correct. This was the weakest part of the project because of lack of time. Another problem with having ESL students or regular students is that students got exited or moved away to different school districts. In our case, one student was dropped in the middle of the project.

With the different types of journals it may be beneficial to other teachers to use a longer period of time in each journal in order for students to better understand the nature of each type of journal. For ESL students, vocabularies seem very limited therefore it would be practical while students were reading new books to extend and analyze unfamiliar words. Later on, students may want to apply the new learned words into their writing.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Initial Student Writing Survey

1. How do you feel about writing? ☺ ☹

2. What do you like about writing?

3. What don't you like about writing?

4. Do you keep a journal at home (diary, private notes)?

5. If you write where do you usually write?

6. Do you think your writing is:

No problem	ok	Big time problems
☺		☹

Appendix B
Initial Survey

Name_____
Date_____

Writing Assessment

Topic:
Imagine you are the richest kid in the world. What would you do with your money? Where would you go? What would you like to change with in your life?

Appendix C

Journal Response Rubric

Personal and Literary Journal

Criteria	Points
Length – minimum of 4 sentences	1
Complete sentences (Capital letter at the beginning of the sentence and punctuation at the end of the sentences.)	1
Content - should make sense and be clear	1
Paragraph - should be in paragraph form	1
Total Points	4

Dialogue Journal

Criteria	Points
Length - Minimum of 2 questions and answers	1
Complete sentences (Capital letter at the beginning of the sentence and punctuation at the end of the sentences.)	1
Content - should make sense and be clear	1
Dialogue – all questions should be answered	1
Total Points	4

Appendix D
Sample Journal Page

Personal Journal:
Tell about the hardest work you ever had to do. How did you feel when the job was done?

Appendix E
Sample Journal Page

Dialogue Journal #12
What is your favorite movie?

Appendix F
Sample Journal Page

Literary Journal:
Select a book of your interest. Read and summarize in your own word.

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